

*Citation for published version:*

Smith, M 2020, 'A Bourdieusian Interpretation of English Language Learning: The Case of Korea', *Korea TESOL Journal*, vol. 15, no. 2, 1, pp. 3-22. <<https://koreatesol.org/content/korea-tesol-journal-15-2-online-now>>

*Publication date:*  
2020

*Document Version*  
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication](#)

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## A Bourdieusian Interpretation of English Language Learning: The Case of Korea

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In recent years, educational research describing the sociological impact of the English language has drawn increasingly on the theories of Pierre Bourdieu to account for the mechanisms by which ELT imbricates in social stratification. Accordingly, this critical study takes as its analytical focus the Bourdieusian concepts of “habitus,” “capital,” and “field” in an effort to illustrate the structural and cognitive pressures that drive English language education and thus intergenerational social inequality. Specifically, Bourdieu’s model is employed to foster a theoretical comprehension of the post-globalization developmental strategies of the Republic of Korea during a period of sustained political and social reform. It has been shown that the interplay between Korea and internationalization has resulted in the identification of English as a resource crucial to the accumulation of capital within the transnational arena. This conflation of internationalization and *Englishization* acts not only as an instrument for responding to global pressures but a vehicle for elite privilege reinforcement, sustaining circular forms of socioeconomic inequality on the basis of language proficiency – to the advantage of the agentive forces behind the local dissemination of English and the disadvantage of broader subaltern populations. As a consequence, EFL instrumentalization within the Korean sociolinguistic field is illustrative of the measures by which dominant classes propagate self-aggrandizing values and norms via the manipulation of cultural capital, thereby achieving the hegemonic subjugation of subordinate groups via structural and ideological mechanisms.

*Keywords:* English language education, social reproduction, stratification, Bourdieu

## BACKGROUND

The determinative effects of what Bourdieu (1989) defines as *habitus*, *capital*, and *field* in the structuring and maintenance of social reproduction have long held the attention of academia. Within the field of applied linguistics, for example, Bourdieusian interpretations of the interrelations between English as a foreign language (EFL) and the structuring of social classification have emerged as a fundamental component of sociolinguistic criticism (see Lee, Han, & McKerrow, 2010; Silver, 2004). At the core of these inquiries is an attempt to uncover English language adoption as a dominant contributor to, and indeed, *driver of*, socio-educational inequity within non-native speaking locales. Given the observable association between neoliberal, globalized policy enactments and English language spread, some (Phillipson, 1992) have sought to categorize this dynamic as an all-too-deliberate Western-driven imposition that aims to enhance the social, political, and financial dichotomy between the Global North and South.

Contesting interpretations, however, attempt to account for the sociocultural features distinct to each setting and the potential for domestic actors to hegemonically structure local educational initiatives in an effort to mediate self-determined outcomes (Crystal, 2003). Accordingly, while macro-level frameworks describing the impact of global English are useful in interpreting the causal factors associated with the language's ideological structuring and sustained dominance, it is advisable that inquiries account for micro-level, individually situated context if they are to lay legitimate claim to comprehensiveness. In this regard, Bourdieu's interpretation of *habitus* offers a compelling lens through which to analyze and understand "the relation between structure and agent in the context of practice" (Chandler, 2013, p. 469) as situated within both the local and global domains. Moreover, an appreciation of Bourdieu's anastomotic concepts of *capital* and *field* is beneficial when attempting to illustrate the mechanisms by which EFL policy discourses impact upon the process of linguistic hierarchization – or, to be more specific, the manner by which numerous non-native-speaking locales have agentively assigned asymmetrical economic, social, and cultural capital to English, thereby framing their particular linguistic fields in overt ways (Silver, 2004).

The environment that has shaped foreign language education in the

officially monolingual Republic of Korea (hereafter, Korea), for example, has borne witness to a near-unparalleled pursuit of English. Specifically, English language learning (ELL) within Korea has been institutionalized under the guise of the nation's self-insertion into globalization and its accompanying shift toward neoliberalist political-financial practices. As a consequence, the capability to speak English is now regarded by many Koreans as a legitimate conduit for social and economic advancement, and a "major criterion in education, employment, and job-performance evaluation" (Song, 2011, p. 35). By way of example, the nation's *yeongeol yeolpung*<sup>1</sup>, or "English fever," is so ingrained into the public consciousness that Koreans are recorded to have spent \$16 billion annually on education (Kim, 2015). Lawrence (2012, p. 71) noted that private language institute tuition fees accounted for 73 percent of total domestic outlay, compared to the 24 percent provided by government-funded schooling.

As this study will illustrate, the mechanisms behind Korea's fascination – perhaps fixation – with English are both complex and anchored to features of local culture that have remained socially encoded for centuries. That Koreans are willing to learn English is self-evident; nevertheless, given the cognitive and financial costs borne the learner, there are ethical as well as academic motivations for this investigation. It should be noted, however, that despite the noticeable impact of globalization – and thus, the political machinations of the Global North – on Korean educational policy, it is not the purpose of this investigation to provide a post-colonial description of global-level Centre-Periphery hegemonic oppression (Phillipson, 2014). Rather, *locally agentic* educational policies will be critically examined in conjunction with socio-historical features consistent to the Korean setting to provide a micro-level account of the contemporary positionality of EFL education and its impact on the Korean EFL learner. As a consequence, this paper proposes a Bourdieusian investigation of Korean foreign language policy intentions in an effort to expose the degrees of interaction between institutionalized linguistic habitus and the scope of Korean EFL capital within that specific sociolinguistic field.

## BOURDIEU'S HABITUS, CAPITAL, AND FIELD

Bourdieu frames his employment of habitus as “a set of historical relations ‘deposited’ within individual bodies in the forms of mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation, and action” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p. 16). Put simply, habitus is a conceptual tool fundamental to understanding the innate behaviors, competencies, and dispositions that one inherits and cultivates as a result of their codified social grouping and continued life experiences. Consequently, habitus is central not only to the successful navigation of familiar social environments; it also extends to an individual’s intuitive predilection towards a range of cultural objects, including the means why which they absorb, process, and utilize language. Through the lens of *linguistic habitus*, Bourdieu (1977) characterizes language as one’s embodied system of “objective structures” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 662), determined initially by one’s socially accumulated linguistic competencies, before assimilation into a distinct cognitive and somatic disposition. Due to this process, habitus is inherently linked to an individual’s ability to anticipate strategically – and thus exploit – their accumulated linguistic resources, such as pronunciation, diction, lexicon, and foreign language competencies.

Thus, all forms of discourse act not only as a mechanism of communication but as an agency of dominance (Bourdieu, 1982) imbricating in “power struggles over what is and what is not regarded as acceptable and valuable” (Zotzmann, 2013, p. 253). Accordingly, language exhibits analogous behavior with that of an economic market (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 662), involving the transaction of linguistic capital that is subject to variation in market worth, depending on its specific sociolinguistic context (British Received Pronunciation possessing higher prestige over Estuary English, for example). As a consequence, the presence of the market of linguistic exchange not only facilitates *but is central to* the continual reconditioning of individual habitus. Bourdieu (1977) reasons:

Situations in which linguistic productions are explicitly sanctioned and evaluated, such as examinations or interviews, draw our attention to the existence of mechanisms determining the price of discourse which operate in every linguistic interaction (e.g., the doctor–patient or lawyer–client relation), and more generally in all social relations. It follows that agents continuously subjected to the

sanctions of the linguistic market, functioning as a system of positive and negative reinforcements, acquire durable dispositions which are the basis of their perception and appreciation of the state of the linguistic market. (p. 654)

While the connection between habitus and one's first language (L1) is overt, compelling are the mechanisms by which linguistic habitus contributes to second (L2) or foreign language acquisition. One is afforded a higher likelihood of winning what Bourdieu terms "the games of culture" (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 54) when their habitus exhibits commonality with cultural markers laid by broader society (thereby obeying the specific logic of the *field*). Thus, when a community elects to allocate symbolic resources to a foreign language, one's linguistic practice must be modified to accommodate the emergent dynamics of the market. Fundamentally, linguistic habitus represents the corporeal embodiment of linguistic capital, itself an individual feature of the broader forms of capital.

Bourdieu (1986) develops the concept of capital beyond its narrow economic interpretation to incorporate mutually constitutive social and cultural features. Accordingly, while economic capital represents those resources that may be converted directly into financial assets, such as money and property (Cho, 2017), an individual's social capital is determined proportionally by their cumulative social network – and the opportunities and obligations that those connections facilitate. Cultural capital, meanwhile, is described as those symbolic assets, both tangible and intangible, that are acquired by virtue of one's distinguishing level of social stratification – thereby representing an implicit currency that is traded during the navigation of culture. Specifically, cultural capital is structured around a triumvirate of the institutionalized, objectified, and embodied forms.

The formal measurement of one's cultural competence or authority, typically in the form of academic or professional credentials, is representative of the institutionalized state. In its objectified form, cultural capital is exemplified by the hierarchized material objects, or "cultural goods" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 243) that are used to distinguish one's social class or degree of capital – which may include items such as clothing, automobiles, or art. Finally, the embodied state of cultural capital is denoted by the forms of knowledge that reside within an individual in the shape of enduring dispositions, both physical and

cognitive (Bourdieu, 1986), which are inherited via the process of socialization. Crucially, as an individual consolidates embodied forms of cultural capital, those items metamorphosize into a form of habitus, and thus lack the capacity for instantaneous transmission (Bourdieu, 1986, pp. 244–245). In this regard, one of the earliest forms of capital in the embodied state is that which is acquired via language, such as an individual's L1 or regional dialect.

Significant in Bourdieu's description of capital is the role of scholastic achievement in the reproduction of social stratification via the "hereditary transmission of cultural capital" (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244). Cultural capital is, like all forms of currency, an item that can be retained, invested, or consumed during the procurement of desired resources (Kingston, 2001). That the social return of education is presumed to be dependent both on the qualification's institutionalized worth and the social capital that one has accrued via networked credentials (Bourdieu, 1986) is thus unsurprising. This dynamic facilitates the conversion of cultural capital into economic capital via desirable forms of employment, which in turn, permits a user to aggrandize further and hereditarily transmit cultural capital. Consequently, the educational institution reflects, and is indeed responsive to, "the cultural orientation of the dominant class" (Kingston, 2001, p. 89). This interlinked process of conversion, therefore, represents a significant determiner of social inclusion and exclusion (DiMaggio, 1982).

All forms of capital are transformed automatically into symbolic capital when an actor enters a specific social environment or field. Subsequently, each field possesses a distinct and unquestionable orthodoxy or *doxa*, according to which the group at an aggregated level will evaluate an individual to ascribe him or her their social position within that specific environment. Given that individuals inhabit differentiated positions within distinct fields, it is consistent that the mechanisms by which they utilize language are similarly differentiated (Zotzmann, 2013). As a consequence, fields act as spatial arenas in which capital in all of its forms is accrued and, crucially, contested between accumulating actors. Thus, it is prerequisite that one observes the broader processes by which power is engendered and regulated between fields, agents within those fields, and the linguistic and broader habitus of the agents involved if one is to comprehend the distinct linguistic dynamics of a locale (Greenfell, 2012).

## THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF ELL IN KOREA

When assessing Korea's complicated relationship with ELL, one must first be appreciative of the significance of both East Asian traditionalism and the opening of the peninsula to outside influence in 1876. Prior to this, Korea's political and societal values had remained effectively unchallenged for centuries, manifested in the saturation of Neo-Confucianist ideologies that were embedded culturally during the late Goryeo period (918–1392). Most notably, filial piety, dedication to the nation-state, strict adherence to hierarchy, and cultivation of the self via scholarly pursuit (Han, 2007). The fate of the peninsula was to be irreversibly altered in 1876, however, following the endorsement of the Japan–Korea Treaty of Amity<sup>2</sup>, which opened the peninsula to foreign diplomatic relations. Agreements with Western nations soon followed, including the United States in 1882 and the British Empire a year later (Kim, 2005), with the ensuing influx of foreign service personnel, traders, and, crucially, Christian missionaries proving instrumental in forging the country's early English language teaching (ELT) institutions.

In Bourdieusian terms, this period was fundamental to the reshaping of various Korean fields and the forms of capital contained therein. Nevertheless, while the influences of external cultural ideologies on the reorganization of feudal Korea are apparent, the mechanisms with which they were employed were connected initially to pre-existing social stratification dynamics. For instance, while a dedication to academic pursuits and the Neo-Confucian ideal of the learned gentleman was, and indeed remains, an emblematic component of local cultural discourse, access to elite education was highly restricted. The civil service examinations that acted as the gateway for feudal-era prestige and power were tightly controlled, with students typically drawn from Korea's powerful ruling aristocracy (Palais, 2014, p. 138). For instance, the alumnus of Korea's first state school by modern standards<sup>3</sup>, the *Yugyong Kongwon* (Royal College), consisted exclusively of the sons of high-ranking officials (Yi, 1984), who were schooled as English language interpreters in an effort to ease diplomatic negotiations with foreign dignitaries. Given that these roles were dependent upon requisite heritage and correlative social capital, the utilization of ELT in the maintenance and replication of asymmetrical social reproduction during this period is manifest.



Nevertheless, English rapidly became a symbol of egalitarianism and democracy within Korea (Shin, 2007), with several non-government affiliated mission schools delivering education to the underprivileged: recruiting students irrespective of heritage, wealth, or gender. Indeed, mission schools were the only source of education for women at this time, with Korea's first female school, the *Ewha Haktang*, still thriving today in the form of Ewha Womans University, one of Asia's largest and most prestigious female-exclusive educational institutes (Kim, 2007). English would subsequently develop into a significant component of local tertiary education, with fellow elite universities, including Seoul National, enhancing ELL's institutional capital by employing English language testing as a means of screening prospective students (Kim, 2011) – a trend that continues to this day.

Following the Korean War and the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement in 1953, the country entered a period of extreme poverty that was to last beyond the deposition of the corrupt Lee Seung-man government and subsequent coup of May 16th, 1961. Nevertheless, by the late 1960s, Korea had entered a cycle of modernization that was, in part, manifested by President Park Chung-hee's commitment to human capital development via uniform basic scholarship. Specifically, Park manipulated the Confucian ideals of communalism and scholarly progression during the *Saemaul Undong* (New Community Movement – Korea's compressed modernization period), providing unparalleled levels of social cohesion and the highly literate workforce that was to be instrumental in facilitating the dramatic phase of Korean economic development commonly referred to as the "Miracle on the Han River" (Kleiner, 2001, p. 254).

The post-Korean War period is further characterized by sustained neo-colonial exposure from the West, particularly from the US, and gradual assimilation into Western ideologies, including globalization, neoliberalism, democracy, and consumerism (Kim, 2000) – with EFL positioned as a mechanism fundamental to the realization of these concepts (Lee, Han, & McKerrow, 2010). Continued exposure was, in time, facilitated by a newly emergent power stratum, consisting of repatriated Koreans who had fled the previously war-ravaged peninsula or received US-funded Western educations as part of the agreement that ensured Korea's participation in the Vietnam conflict. By the early 1980s, returnees were positioned in highly influential government roles that allowed them to advocate the perceived benefits of EFL and foreign

schooling. Yim (2007) and Jeon (2009) also note that the announcements that Korea was to host both the 1986 Asian and 1988 Olympic Games provided further encouragement. Specifically, the opportunity to showcase an educated and sophisticated society coincided with the acute period of Korean internationalization known locally as *seggyehwa*<sup>4</sup>, providing the impetus for a boom in ELL that has witnessed EFL emerge as a fundamental component of Korean globalization discourse.

## KOREA'S POST-*SEGYYEHWA* ELL FIELD

The overt connection between education and social stratification, while far from unique to the Korean setting, has been recognized as a sustained feature of local social reproduction. As noted by J. Lee (2010), EFL, in particular, is “consumed as a symbolic measure of one’s competence and is associated with job success, social mobility, and international competitiveness” (J. Lee, 2010, pp. 246–247). Thus, the interplay between Korea and internationalization has resulted in the identification of English as a resource crucial to the accumulation of capital within the transnational arena. For example, *seggyehwa* policy is commonly referred to by local linguists (Jeon, 2009; Song, 2011) as being central in propagating, from the governmental level to the public, the significance of EFL capital – and thus, the language’s value within the market of linguistic exchange. This was illustrated directly in contemporary educational reform, specifically the Korean Ministry of Education’s Sixth (1995) and Seventh (2000) National Curricula (cited in Chang, 2009, p. 88), which as described by Chang (2009), emphasized the belief that “if Korea is to function effectively as a nation in the era of globalization, then Korean people must be able to communicate effectively in English” (p. 94). As a consequence, EFL functions locally as an indicator of internationalization and modernity, and, by these measures, its acquisition defines the means by which social agents are legitimized and integrated within an industrialized *global* Korea.

Subsequently, English has been ideologically positioned as requisite not only to the maintenance and enhancement of national competitiveness but as a “tool for Korea to *survive*<sup>5</sup> in the international community” (Yim, 2007, p. 37). As noted by Lee, Han, and McKerrow (2010), this modality was particularly prevalent during the presidency of

Lee Myung-bak. Specifically, Lee called upon Social Darwinist allegory to depict English as a “weapon” within the “battlefield” of globalization (cited in Lee, Han & McKerrow, 2010, p. 338), thereby dogmatically manipulating *survival of the fittest* rhetoric in an effort to enhance the symbolic worth of EFL’s institutional-cultural capital and, as a consequence, conserve the dominant linguistic habitus.

Given the context described thus far, it is wholly unsurprising that ELL has been embraced as a mechanism for Korean self-advancement. English’s association with Korean modernization discourse and initial circumvention of the cultural-social capital features necessary for participation in education has left an indelible mark on the habitus of local agents and, indeed, the broader Korean field. Due to these dynamics, several local academics (J. Lee, 2010; Shin, 2010) have interpreted Korean EFL instrumentalism as being structured in such a manner that it serves to conserve and replicate a distinctly asymmetric social-relation structure. Song (2011), for example, notes that

English has been recruited, in the guise of globalization, to exploit the meretricious ideology of merit to the advantage of the privileged classes and the disadvantage of the other classes of the society. English in South Korea cannot be understood fully unless it is recognized that its importance has not been as much engendered by globalization, as it has been resorted to as a subterfuge to conceal where the responsibility for inequality in education lies within the society. (Song, 2011, p. 35)

Likewise, Shin (2010) explicitly calls upon Bourdieu to describe the elite-driven symbolic capital attached to EFL – notably “authentic” forms of English acquired at prestigious Western universities – as reflecting the desire to reproduce pre-existing social positionality via the creation of a “new capital of distinction” (Shin, 2010, p. 11). This is achieved not only by the aforementioned forms of inner-circle<sup>6</sup> education that are accessible to only the wealthiest of Koreans but the demand by local educational and industrial institutions for standardized EFL assessment mechanisms, such as those provided by the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and Test of English Proficiency (TEPS)<sup>7</sup>. According to Jambor (2012), Korea’s two most prestigious technical universities, KAIST (formally the Korea Advanced Institute of Science and Technology), and POSTECH (Pohang University of Science

and Technology) both employ EFL as the sole means of communication whilst, as mentioned previously, almost the entirety of elite-level local educational institutions utilize standardized EFL testing measures as a means of filtering prospective students.

Moreover, Song (2011), notes that “over 90 percent of employees in manufacturing and export industries are continuously assessed for their English competence” (p. 42). Thus, EFL in the context of the Korean socio-educational field is embedded firmly within the structures of institutional capital and competition, with its acquisition representing a collective imperative, rather than agentive determination (Piller & Cho, 2015). The hegemonic ideologies that serve to benefit both the language testing industry and Korean establishment simultaneously act to constrain the material and symbolic choices of local agents rather than, as they posit, expand them – a process consistent with Bourdieu’s (1998) acerbic description of the neoliberal utopia.

This model is reinforced directly by the socioeconomic mechanisms associated with local ELL. A study by Kim (2012), for example, found that “seventy percent of students from families earning 5 million won<sup>8</sup> or more a month received private English education in 2010, fully 3.5 times the 20 percent from those earning less than 1 million won<sup>9</sup>” (Kim, 2012, p. 3). Thus, the attainment of the forms of capital requisite for executing local success is limited amongst the financially disadvantaged, thereby representing a distinct English divide. In doing so, it may be argued that the positionality of EFL within the Korean socio-educational-industrial fields embodies the discursive authority of predetermined meritocracy, reinforced on the institutional and ideological levels by the hereditary transmission of economic, social, and cultural capital.

## **EFL CAPITAL AS A PRIMARY AGENT OF DISTINCTION**

Recognizing as a basis that each social field constitutes an arena of practice in which context-specific doxa are applied, reinforced, and, crucially, internalized by actors, capital represents those resources that may be strategically exploited to establish positionality within the framework of a specific field, thereby contributing to the reproduction of its sphere of influence (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, each social arena facilitates contestation over not only the economic forms of capital but

“instruments for the appropriation of symbolic wealth socially designated as worthy of being sought and possessed” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 73). Within the Korean sociolinguistic field, for instance, institutionally-driven foreign language ideologies have resulted in the explicit attribution of symbolic capital to EFL, which, according to the framework laid by Bourdieu (1977), yields enhanced legitimacy within the market of linguistic exchange. Due to the relative position of English within the global economy, local EFL users are afforded significant opportunities for gaining access to desirable forms of education and employment, and thus, the economic capital inherent to these features.

As a consequence, the conjunction between material wealth and the primacy of EFL instrumentalism represents a visible manifestation of cultural-economic capital conversion. This process is achieved via the propagation of language ideologies that serve to rationalize pre-existing social structure and “justify social inequality as an outcome of linguistic difference” (Piller, 2015, p. 1) – a mechanism consistent with local cultural dynamics. Specifically, social capital within Korea is tied heavily to the concept of *yonjul* (approximately: ties, or connections), which manifests itself based on an individual’s ascribed status – commonly via ancestry, regional origin, wealth, or education. As described by Horak (2015), “*yonjul* ties exist for a purpose, often to secure personal gains and benefits” (p. 78), while also serving as a barrier to those who do not share the particularistic relation. However, while *yonjul* dynamics may act to preserve Centre–Periphery socioeconomic exclusion, the “densely knit network creates pressure for an individual to conform to the group ... exerting enormous pressure for conformity to the members” (Yee, 2000, p. 342). Thus, the constraints and pressures regulating sociolinguistic reproduction within such groups function by both positive and negative measures.

Considering one’s capacity for social network exploitation depends broadly on an actor’s accrued cultural and economic capital, Korea’s “*yonjul* society” (Lee, 2000, p. 369) offers a convincing exemplar of Bourdieu’s (1986) capital regulation-reproduction process. Deliberately structured by those possessing the corresponding linguistic competences and, thus, “vested interests in the practical and symbolic meanings of English” (Cho, 2017, p. 170) to function as a gatekeeper to the various forms of capital. Accordingly, the standardized testing mechanisms by which local EFL “productions are explicitly sanctioned and evaluated” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 654) by local institutions represent certificates of

cultural competence (Bourdieu, 1986), resulting in “graduates from privileged backgrounds” (Smith & Kim, 2015, p. 342) gaining overwhelmingly favorable access to preferred forms of employment – aided by their command of EFL-related cultural capital and the social capital accrued via dynastic privilege and alma mater. English within Korea, therefore, must be understood as an overt manifestation of power dynamics between actors (Bourdieu, 1977), specifically embodying a skewed distribution across socioeconomic positionality due to “the scholastic yield from educational action depend[ing] on the cultural capital previously invested by the family” (Bourdieu, 1986, p. 244).

Consolidated as a product to be consumed during social reproduction (Phillipson, 2008), EFL within Korea facilitates cultural hegemony from a Bourdieusian perspective. Specifically, those possessing high degrees of cultural, social, and economic capital have established EFL as a dominant form of embodied capital, or *taste*, to function as a prestige code by those who speak English, and to act as a barrier to social mobility to those who do not. Via metaphors that depict English as a transnational tool of development, ELL interlocks with symbolic and material systems, legitimizing existing class fractions and asymmetrical social distinction due to the internalization of ideologies by those retaining lower volumes of capital. The elite-driven cultural capital of local EFL, in naturalizing the misconception that English is necessary to the enhancement of Korea’s global positionality, exemplifies what Bourdieu terms “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 358). Moreover, considering that the social conditioning governing dominant forms of taste is internalized during the early stages of cognitive development, the modification of such behaviors may prove acutely difficult, if not impossible. Based on these assertions, one’s embodied forms of cultural-linguistic capital – reflective of the systematic corporeal and affective structuring of a social actor – represents, perhaps, the most visible demonstration of habitus.

## THE KOREAN LINGUISTIC HABITUS

As noted by Crossley (2001), field and habitus are intertwined in an openly circular dynamic in which participation within a specific field frames the habitus, which, as a result, influences the actions that

reproduce the field during the accumulation of capital. Thus, one's linguistic habitus is constituted, reinforced, and modified via a continual process of positive and negative sanctioning, occurring across a range of linguistic markets (Shin, 2014). In describing the interplay between Korea and the features of power associated with English language appropriation, for example, it has been shown that the linguistic habitus of local agents are influenced by a notable interaction between agency and structure (Cho, 2017), specifically via institutionally endorsed neoliberal ideologies that explicitly link ELL to the enhancement of both individual and national development, modernity, and mobility (J. Lee, 2010). In this regard, negotiations between Koreans and local sociolinguistic norms are connected broadly to the meretricious notion of advancement via demonstrable English language competency and achievement – determined by attending financially prohibitive private ELL academies, and both local and inner-circle-based elite education institutions (Shin, 2010), which are, in turn, endorsed by standardized language assessment measures.

Thus, linguistic habitus within Korea is characterized by an imbalance between objective and subjective pressures, specifically “between recognized norms and the capacity to produce” (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 658). As noted by Cho (2017), this process is particularly relevant to the analysis of local EFL power structures “in which recognized acceptability and legitimacy in English remains elusive due to the ever-fiercer competition over English and resultant ever-rising standards of English” (Cho, 2017, p. 21). Nevertheless, that EFL-related capital is exploited locally as a screening mechanism for industry, and education is reflective of endemic academic inflation within the Korean education system. D. Y. Lee (2010) notes that, in 2005, the university acceptance ratio of secondary school graduates reached 82.1 percent, resulting in local tertiary education alone proving insufficient to the generation of the academic capital (both symbolic and tangible) required for social advancement (D. Y. Lee, 2010). As a result of this process, the significance of EFL within the Korean linguistic habitus is particularly heightened amongst the middle and upper classes (Park & Lo, 2012), who possess the requisite economic capital to access ELL. This dynamic has resulted in the widely described “English divide” (Cho, 2017; J. Lee, 2010; Shin, 2010), which functions to enhance polarized forms of socio-educational stratification and, thus, cultural distinction.

Considering that said partition is characterized by the unequal

distribution of EFL-related linguistic capital “between children of wealthy parents and those from lower-income families” (Jeon, 2012, p. 407), which, given the intensely competitive nature of the Korean industrial and educational domains (Byun, Schofer, & Kim, 2012), is essential to generating socioeconomic success, one must inquire whether the criterion that would distinguish Korea as an authentic meritocracy have, in fact, been achieved. Nevertheless, ideologies describing the enhancement of social mobility via individual competition and rigorous dedication to scholarly achievement are so ingrained within the Korean habitus that they act to mask the structural inequalities governing local social reproduction, which, in turn, sustains the division of EFL proficiency based on dynastic capital.

Additionally, it has been noted that Social Darwinist rhetoric has intersected with ideologies advocating extreme forms of patriotism in an effort to enhance the dominant positionality of EFL within the Korean sociolinguistic field (Lee, Han, & McKerrow, 2010). Thus, language learning by way of a social actor’s distinct linguistic capital matters not only in the context of social mobility but fuses with other social categories, including citizenship (Shin, 2014, p. 99). In connecting these concepts, the Korean habitus is responsive to the pervasive ideology that one must participate in (preferably desirable forms of) ELL if one is to distinguish oneself as a productive and patriotic citizen. Subsequently, this dynamic emphasizes the potential cognitive friction in positioning culturally extrinsic products as mechanisms vital to the enhancement of national prestige. Moreover, given that financially disadvantaged Koreans are typically excluded from ELL, the upper and middle classes are, by extension, afforded enhanced opportunities of being recognized as “patriotic” citizens, potentially enhancing affective disharmony within those excluded from ELL.

In consequence, the core expectations by which EFL is rationalized locally favor the wealthy, to the exclusion of those constrained by circular socioeconomic stratifications and a resultant dearth of professional advancement. The presence of this dynamic within the Korean habitus may result in the acceptance of exclusion based on predetermined wealth, further increasing social class frictions. Given both the professional and social requirements for EFL competency and the seemingly immovable presence of English within the Korean habitus, one must pose the question whether local language learners do, in fact, agentively elect to participate in ELL.



## CONCLUSIONS

In drawing on Bourdieu's concepts, this investigation has attempted to critically appraise the underlying structures that secure the hegemonic role of English within the Korean sociolinguistic sphere. Subsequently, it is apparent that EFL dominance within this setting is maintained and strengthened in accordance with "habitus that forms Koreans' dispositions that determine how they are supposed to act and respond in dealing with and making sense of English in their everyday lives" (Park, 2009, p. 27). In this context, the integration of Korean EFL with the various forms of capital illustrates that pervasive language ideologies continue to circulate and evolve via the sociolinguistic practices of local speakers (Cho, 2017), thereby lending credence to Bourdieu's (1982) assertion that "the language of authority never governs without the collaboration of those it governs, without the help of the social mechanisms capable of producing this complicity" (Bourdieu, 1982, p. 113). It has therefore been demonstrated that homologies between sociolinguistic fields, and the relations between actors within those fields, are anchored in specific forms of power, expressed here by a distinctly circular transmission of EFL-related capital.

As a consequence, EFL instrumentalization within the Korean sociolinguistic field is illustrative of the procedures by which a dominant class propagates self-aggrandizing values and norms via the manipulation of cultural items, thereby achieving the hegemonic subjugation of subordinate groups via ideological mechanisms. Due to the discursive realities of English adoption within Korea, it is thus paramount that future research provides ethnographic comprehension of the sociological impact of ELL and the procedures by which its constituent processes are effectuated within this distinct field. Indeed, an appreciation of the micro-level dynamics by which social mobility, citizenship, identity, and ELL converge in the lives of EFL users, and the means by which their linguistic practices are driven via the habitus formed through social reproduction, is invaluable in understanding the *authentic* processes by which the uneven power structures inherent to linguistic hierarchization are sustained and, in turn, internalized in the form of unquestionable orthodoxies and habits that act to fundamentally preserve and circulate "the very structure that has given rise to them in the first place" (Malik & Mohamed, 2014, p. 72).

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## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> All Romanization of Hangeul employs the Revised Romanization of Korean system.
- <sup>2</sup> Referred to in Korean as *Ganghwa-do Joyag* (The Treaty of Ganghwa Island).
- <sup>3</sup> In this instance, a “modern” school is one that provides a Western-style curriculum.
- <sup>4</sup> Literally: globalization. President Kim Young-sam’s 1994 drive for internationalization, which produced significant reforms of the Korean political, cultural, and social economies (Kim, 2000).
- <sup>5</sup> Italics added for emphasis.
- <sup>6</sup> “Inner circle” is a spatial metaphor denoting the conventional bases of the English language, such as the UK, US, and Australia (Kachru, 1985).
- <sup>7</sup> Initially designed by Seoul National University in 1992, the TEPS English proficiency test is the primary method of evaluating local English language skills.
- <sup>8</sup> & <sup>9</sup> Approximately 4,186 USD and 837 USD, respectively, employing historically accurate rates of currency exchange.